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Living at Peace with the Land and One's Self

By Cecilia Kapua Lindo

ALOHA 'AINA or respect and love for the land was an attitude and value that tied the ancient Hawaiians to the maternal depths of the earth. Their philosophical and spiritual heritage was rooted in the adage called "Te Pito O Te Honua," or the navel and center of the earth.

They believed that they, and the Islands of Hawai'i were the offspring of the nature gods Papa, or Earth Mother, and Wakea, Sky Father. Papa fed her offspring from her nurturing breast and was the giver of life. Her husband Wakea fertilized her verdant lands with rain and sun, and brought life to the 'aina.

These cosmogonic parents moved through the universe, and wove it together in a single harmonious totality. They were the cosmic energies of unspoken power that pervaded the lives of all beings. The early Hawaiians believed in this mana (divine power), and centered their attention on it.

They equated the natural world as a world of the supernatural. They knew that when Papa and Wakea decided to be ruthless, human kind were no match for them.

The earth moved the early Hawaiians powerfully. They were family or 'ohana to the shark, owl, lizard and all beings, a thought incomprehensible to modern man.

THE NATURAL WORLD the early Hawaiians believed in is more real than the empirical world of the intellect, for it unites both worlds in total reality. Such a beautiful value must be kept alive and stressed, for we can only understand life today

Another look at the problems of Hawaiians. The author heads the education committee for the Polynesian Voyaging Society and is a teacher at Hongwanji Elementary School.

by what took place yesterday. What took place in the past in regard to the 'aina is relevant for all times.

You can see the danger of today's urban deterioration and nuclear warfare because men have thrown overboard or are ignorant of such values.

As offspring and tillers of the earth, the early Hawaiians believed that the life of the land was perpetuated by the cultivation and wise use of the 'aina. The land provided them with 'ai or food, so it was considered sacred.

Aloha 'aina or care for the outer landscape was a valued concept. Through agriculture, the maka'ainana or farmers made a living for themselves, their families and those who depended on them. According to historian Kamakau, cultivating the 'aina was a favorite occupation of the early Hawaiians. Therefore, the land flourished because of the hard work and care the maka'ainana gave to the soil and crops.

The Hawaiians were ingenious and divided their 'aina so that they could have water from the land and sea. These land divisions called ahupua'a were cleverly engineered.

ALTHOUGH HAWAII HAS PASSED from an agricultural society to an urban society, the Hawaiian value of aloha 'aina still remains a fact of life, because the land sustains us and gives us food.

Modern man does not recognize his inferiority to the 'aina around him, and within him. As a result he is spiritually starved and infected by conceit, and an insatiable greed that is never satisfied. He is like a mongoose trying to swallow a pig as he exploits the 'aina, and life itself. Aloha 'aina holds little meaning for him and he feels dehumanized and isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature, which once had spiritual meaning; where thunder was the voice of the gods, rivers and valleys contained spirits, the sea had demi-gods and trees meant a man's life.

Modern man has become rich in knowledge but poor in wisdom. The 'aina is not holy anymore because he is disconnected from it. Land in Hawai'i has become a speculative commodity and much of our lands have vanished by the effects of urban development. Today, we are shocked at Hawai'i's lands which are overpriced, overbuilt, and overcrowded. Many of us feel like fish caught in traps with no way to escape the inflationary prices of land.

High interest rates and land costs price most people out of the land and housing market. Many also feel the need for more open space and better planning of our limited and delicate 'aina.

WHEN GROUPS LIKE the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana use "aloha 'aina" as their slogan and battle cry against land abuse, one wonders why it took so long for someone to strongly protest the haphazard planning of Hawai'i's environment. Sweeping changes and land-use proposals are being made for the year 2000.

Mayor Eileen Anderson and others realize that calamity has befallen the Hawaiian environment and are trying to salvage and restore the deterioration of Waikiki and other places. Yet to change the face of the 'aina after it has been ruined is such a waste of time and money. I hope that, those responsible for land development can learn from past mistakes.

When I was invited to go to Kaho'olawe, my long awaited dream leaped out of hiding and I was at a pinnacle of euphoria. The fears about the bombs of the Target Island disappeared. I was propelled to go there to find out about the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana and their beliefs about aloha 'aina.

As 80 of us settled on Kaho'olawe for four days, I was able to survive with bare minimum.

THE SKY WAS OUR CEILING and the earth and sand, our floor. We took our baths in the sea, slept under the stars and used outhouses to relieve ourselves.

Our front yard—the ocean—supplied us with an abundance of fish, limu and opihi. We all pitched in to chop wood, build the fire for our food, conserve water that was brought in from Maui, and engage in educational activities. Cooperation overflowed and self-importance disappeared. Somehow, the forces of nature had a humbling effect on us and a communal spirit was generated with a genuine love for the 'aina.

Introspection came naturally in the quietude and isolation of Kaho'olawe. After looking at the fish shrines and other archaeological sites, the past fell on me like dead weight. It pushed me into the present and future like an invisible force. I suddenly realized that to remain whole, each one of us must occasionally return to our roots in the wilderness (there are still places like that in Hawai'i) that produced and nurtures us. Such retreats help us to recall the origin of our spirit, a value that our ancestors knew, and a value that most of us have lost.

When I was given a chance to observe life in its primitive form at Kaho'olawe, aloha 'aina seemed crucial because I could truly sense nature's presence and power. The natural, became supernatural, a feeling that can't be experienced in the noisy to-do of the city.

THE STAGE OF QUESTIONING military tactics echoed within me like a cry while on Kaho'olawe. The fact that Hawai'i depends on the military for "fix-it" solutions seemed deplorable and I lamented over Kaho'olawe's mutilation by the Navy.

While it is true that the military helps us in many ways, it was apparent that such oppression of the 'aina under the guise of national defense only revamps the tragic history of native Hawaiians and their vanishing and misused lands. Land in Hawai'i is too precious to be abused in that manner. Furthermore, with such vast acreage of land in Hawai'i under the jurisdiction of the military, I wondered why the 'aina of Kaho'olawe was not spared.

The cause of the 'ohana to protect Kaho'olawe seemed justifiable to me. The 'ohana's vitality and intelligence made me aware of the need for their presence and thoughts. Dr. Emmett Aluli, a young physician, and Puanani Burgess, a law student, and other leaders of the 'ohana, are concerned about the flow of Hawai'i's destiny.

THEY TOOK THE LEAD to protect Kaho'olawe, channeled their cause through political platitudes, and have been recognized in Maui County's planning process as "stewards" for Kaho'olawe's future. The 'ohana has not chosen to remain quietly isolated. It has won many legal battles. It questioned the criteria for the quality of life in Hawai'i and made some positive changes. Its victory in making Kaho'olawe a National Monument and its 20-year plan to restore Kaho'olawe are remarkable.

It is good to see a Hawaiian group that is not held back by inertia. Indeed, there is a new generation of sincere, determined, committed Hawaiians destined to restore the devastated 'aina of Kaho'olawe as a cultural center and laboratory for survival skills.

They convinced me that the future of Hawaii will be determined by land owners and land use

'Aina, meaning land, is important spiritually. However, "the real cause of suffering begins with the inside 'aina of the mind."

and I'm sure they'll be involved in the planning. Their input and concern for the 'aina, is needed.

To be sure, what little is left of the 'aina or the outer landscape, must be treated with respect to benefit all who call Hawai'i their home. Today, most of the people of Hawai'i see the need for a check and balance of Hawai'i's limited 'aina.

Besides the external 'aina, there is a landscape that is far more important for us to develop and nurture. It is our inner 'aina, the world we carry around inside ourselves.

WHILE IT IS TRUE that well-being is contingent upon economic security, and better social and educational programs, the real cause of suffering begins with the inside 'aina or the mind.

A bewildered life arises out of its own creation. If we harbor greedy thoughts we become greedy, if we cherish thoughts of revenge, then our feet will move us in that direction. When greed, hatred and anger move their tentacles into the human emotions, they suck away and strangle the good sense of the mind.

Good sense and aloha are within every person, but cannot be manifested when our lives are blinded by bias, ignorance and uncontrolled desires. Unrestricted passions can turn into malignant growth that can destroy human life. People cheat, steal, rape, oppress and murder to satisfy these desires, and hurt others because of this kind of psychological poison.

The poor blame the rich for their greed and insensitivity, and in turn project the same characteristics. The "lesser endowed" blame the world for

The Importance of the 'Aina

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being pitted against them but have no clear demarcation of how they pit themselves against the rights of others too.

We can go on blaming institutions for Hawaiian failures, but the real failure comes from people, not institutions. Programs have grown, but popularity and insecurity have grown too.

Federal aid, foundation grants and programs that advocate economic and social self-sufficiency are supportive but they are not going to do for Hawaiian communities what Hawaiians must resolve for themselves.

HAWAIIANS CAN CHOOSE to reject a crime-culture (drugs, truancy, school drop-outs, violence) and other undesired behavior so that positive changes can take place.

Failures and success are caused by our own attitudes. Many of us have homestead lands, and own our lands, but still are troubled because we haven't focused on the shortcomings of our inner 'aina.

It is long overdue that we start criticizing ourselves, instead of others for what happens to us. As we learn to take the responsibility for the misery, we ourselves create, we will free ourselves from self-imposed barriers.

When we believe with every fiber in our being that we are totally responsible for everything we experience in life, we will uncover within our 'aina the qualities that will promote a more loving and productive life.

Leaders, adults, teachers and parents should rid

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themselves of age-old habits and thinking that cloud, and tear down the human spirit and teach their young likewise.

THE LAMENT AND COMPLAINTS about suffering are entirely misunderstood. Blaming others or the external conditions for our high incidence in crime, school drop-outs and welfare, is not reality. We alone create our own problems.

Unfortunately, we are not in control of the 'aina of Kaho'olawe, but we are in control of our inner landscape. We can make immediate changes about the defilements in our unconscious and replace them with goodness and serenity.

Cultivating the inner 'aina does not mean to seek something outside of oneself. It means to see that snake within you, and put it to rest so that it does not destroy you or others. It means to clean out the dust and dirt that is stored in the mind so that clear thinking can occur. It means to stop blaming schools, drugs, alcohol, tourism, or businesses for the agony we create within our inner landscapes.

We must see ourselves and things as they really exist even though this reality may appear frightening or depressing. The stranger to reality suffers a great deal and inflicts cruelty to himself.

We must become aware of the interconnectedness of all living things. To deny this truth is to deny reality. We are all interdependent on the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, plants, rain and animals for our food; the list is endless. The tourist that is burglarized helps to pay the tax dollars that indirectly, or directly help us. Tourism that some people hate employs many Hawaiians. The supermarket that is vandalized helps to provide basic needs. The Japanese, haole or Chinese who is disliked contributes foods that we love to eat, and inventions that make our life convenient and safe. Taxpayers suffer and pay when a school is burned down.

WHEN THERE IS IGNORANCE to the interconnectedness of all life, people are not aware that they exist because of the services of thousands of

people like the farmer, fisherman, baker, garbage man, mailmen, doctor, nurses, and others. We elude the truth of interconnectedness because of our busy lives, self-centeredness and ignorance, yet our perspective and gratitude widens when we can understand this reality.

Rest assured, it is difficult to pardon all the injustices inflicted upon the Hawaiians. Who can forget the loss of our birthright, 'aina, kingdom and the uprooting of our economic system based in subsistence land tenure which prospered for thousands of years?

Who can ignore the psychological, physical, social and spiritual damage and chaos that afflict many Hawaiians till this day?

Who can forgive the exploitation of the 'aina and our uprooted cultural values?

Who can forget the near decimation of our race?

However, we cannot live a free and happy life when we are embroiled in thoughts of fault, blame, and wrongness. These thoughts whether directed at self or others limit our alternatives and exhausts our energies that are needed for productive, daily living.

Lamenting about the past and future is a waste of time. Focusing our attention on the here and now will improve our lot, yet nothing can improve without our own, genuine effort. What we do about our lives at this moment is the only thing that counts. We must ask ourselves, "what are we doing to improve our inner and outer 'aina?" It is not right for us to think we cannot succeed.

WE HAWAIIANS have a lot to be grateful for—the revival of songs and dances, canoeing, Hokule'a, Kamehameha Schools, Alu Like, the Hawaiian Homesteads.

Our kupuna lived in gratitude and had great aloha for their outer and inner 'aina. They were grateful for the littlest 'elepaio bird that pecked on a tree for worms, and helped them to pick the right log for a canoe. The bird became an honored deity because the Hawaiians depended on it for survival.

Our kupuna were great conservationists and just took what they needed to eat from the land and the sea. They had aloha for the 'aina and did not abuse it. We too can restore our dead senses to understand the oneness of man with the universe.

It is such a paradox that we call ourselves the people of aloha when many of our lives are not filled with the spirit of sympathy, gratitude, peace and loving kindness.

RESPECT AND ALOHA for our inner 'aina can become a reality because we are the masters of our own destiny. We inherited our minds that can direct us to wherever we want to go. Those who are stronger, must help those who are weaker so that they too can be directed toward a higher level of consciousness.

If each of us becomes more aware of his inner thoughts, good change can take place and happiness will become a way of life for us instead of violence and frustration.

If we acknowledge the universe that is more vast than ourselves, we will be able to do away with arrogance and selfishness and gain spiritual harmony with the powerful universe of which we are a small part. Each one of us lives in two 'aina, the world without, and the world within. Whether we are happy or depressed depends first on the kind of thinking we nurture within our inner 'aina. Our sincere aloha for our inner 'aina, will help us to love and care for our external 'aina.

Since 1778, foreigners have recorded the spontaneous, open, generous nature of our ancestors who were geniuses of the heart because they had a pure beauty of the spirit. These are ageless values that are needed more than ever before.

May our inner 'aina be filled with that spirit as we live just a tiny moment on this external 'aina which is the body and soul of our cosmogonic parents. If we hold fast to the ancient values about the 'aina, we'll be able to live in harmony in today's machine-like realm.